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FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1266
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENNA 001614

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/IR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/03/2018

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SUBJECT: IRANIAN EX-PRESIDENT KHATAMI DISCUSSES NUCLEAR
PROGRAM, IRANIAN ELECTIONS WITH GOA LEADERS

Classified by: Economic-Political Counselor J. Dean Yap for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Former Iranian President Khatami discussed Iran's nuclear program, the upcoming Iranian elections, and human rights in Iran with GOA leaders during an October 25-27 visit to Vienna. Khatami told President Fischer that Iran has the right to develop nuclear technology for civilian purposes, and said he hoped the next U.S. administration would engage Iran in direct negotiations. He declined to say whether he would run again for president in the upcoming elections, though GOA contacts say they believe he will not. FM Plassnik discussed discrimination against the Kurdish and Baha'i minorities in Iran and plans for a conference on women and youth in the Middle East with Khatami, who was in Vienna to attend an academic symposium on "Law and the Dialogue of Cultures." End Summary.

Supports Official Line on Nuclear Issue

¶2. (C) Christoph Meran, Deputy MFA Middle East Director, told Polchief on October 30 that President Fischer raised the issue of Iran's nuclear program with Khatami, emphasizing that Austria and the EU want Iran to comply with UNSC resolutions. Meran said Khatami repeated the same position that he had held as Iranian President -- that Iran has the right to develop nuclear technology for civilian purposes. Khatami added that Western mistrust of Iran is matched by Iranian mistrust of the U.S. and EU. He said he hoped that the next U.S. administration would engage in a dialogue with Iran, to include direct diplomatic negotiations. He averred that the EU should "have its own policy" in regard to Iran; Meran said Khatami did not elaborate on this point, but his GOA interlocutors interpreted his comment as a call for the EU to place more emphasis on dialogue, and less on pressure, than the U.S. Khatami argued that the U.S. and EU needed to accept that Iran is an important country with a strong role to play in its region.

¶3. (C) Meran said Khatami told GOA officials before his arrival that he saw no reason to involve the Iranian Embassy, as this was not an official visit. Nevertheless, Iranian Ambassador Sheibany learned of the event and convinced the MFA to include him in the meetings. During the discussion of nuclear issues, Sheibany asserted the official Teheran position that Iran had "done all it could" to comply with its international obligations. Khatami seemed uncomfortable when Sheibany spoke, Meran said.

Evasive On Presidential Run

¶4. (C) Khatami was evasive when Fischer asked him whether he would run again for president. Though Khatami gave no indication of his plans, Meran said GOA officials have the sense that he will probably not run. This is largely based on reporting from the Austrian Embassy in Teheran, which

suggests that Khatami wants to maintain a low profile to avoid clashing with Iranian authorities, Meran said.

FM Discusses Human Rights

¶5. (U) FM Plassnik discussed human rights issues with Khatami. She suggested that a planned initiative on women and youth in the Middle East could be held either in Vienna or at Khatami's Foundation for Dialogue Among Civilizations in Geneva. Khatami expressed interest in the initiative, but did not offer to host the event, Meran said. Plassnik also discussed the issue of discrimination against the Kurdish and Baha'i minorities in Iran. Meran said the Iranian Ambassador will be meeting shortly with the MFA Human Rights Department, in an appointment scheduled well before Khatami's visit.

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